Magic Flame and other Poems

ROBERT HAVEN SCHAUFFLER

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO.

TRADE
REFERENCE
LIBRARY

Please Return To:
2 Park Street, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

MAGIC FLAME
AND OTHER POEMS

Magic Flame

And Other Poems

By Robert Haven Schauffler

Boston and New York
Houghton Mifflin Company
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1923

COPYRIGHT, 1912, 1920, AND 1923, BY ROBERT HAVEN SCHAUFFLER

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND

EDWARD F. SANDERSON

AND THE IMPERISHABLE MEMORY

OF OLD TIMES

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In addition to new work, this book contains a selection of the few poems which I now care to save from my two earlier volumes of verse, at the moment of consigning their plates to the well-deserved melting-pot. Six have been chosen from "Scum o' the Earth," and nineteen from "The White Comrade." Most of these, including the two title-poems, have been revised, and are now the only authorized versions.

I gratefully acknowledge the courtesy of the editors of the following publications, in which certain poems here included have appeared: *The American Poetry Magazine*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Boston Transcript*, *Contemporary Verse*, *The English Review*, *Harper's Monthly*, *The Lyric West*, *The New York Evening Sun*, *The Outlook* (New York), *Scribner's Magazine*, *The Smart Set*, *The Stratford Journal*, *The Sunday Express* (London), and *The Yale Review*.

R. H. S.

CONTENTS

NEW POEMS

Magic Flame 3
Tabula Rasa 5
Portals of the Dawn 7
Romance
I. Rencontre 9
II. Wireless 11
III. Word Music 12
IV. The Loom 13
V. In Absence 14
VI. Message 14
VII. Three Words 15
Vacation 18
Nonsense 19
Music in Hospital 20
The Salutation of the Dawn 22
Three Sonnets of Heaven
I. Dream 24
II. Earth and Heaven 25
III. Seaward 25

CONTENTS

To K. De N. S.

I. Harvest 27

II. Safe 27

III. The Wine of God 29

IV. Before the Great Adventure 29

FROM "SCUM O' THE EARTH, AND OTHER POEMS"

"Scum o' the Earth" 33

Friend Soul 38

The Symphony 39

The Violin 40

For the Fête Champêtre by Giorgione 42

The Music Maker 44

FROM "THE WHITE COMRADE, AND OTHER POEMS"

The White Comrade 49

A Soul Remembers 53

The Wonderful Hour 54

The Broken Window 56

Hidden Treasure 62

Worship 64

Over-Tones 65

Divers 67

The Shadow of Aspiration 68

CONTENTS

Words and Music	69
To the Paint-Brush Poets	70
Browning, the Music Master	71
Paradise Revised	74
Tryst	78
Meuse-Argonne Lyrics	
I. Fear of Fear	81
II. The Look in Their Eyes	82
III. Hit	83
Earth's Easter, MCMXVI	88
Acknowledgment	89

NEW POEMS

MAGIC FLAME

A CANDLE suddenly pierced the night
Where our young curlyhead lay sleeping.
He woke, half dazzled by the light;
Then we saw creeping
Into the mystery of those sleep-dimmed eyes
The dawn of deep surprise,
As he beheld the draught-blown flicker leaping.

He crowed and clapped his hands in extasy
And held them forth to capture
And to caress that thing of rapture.
Thereat, in the exuberance of his pleasure,
Swaying he rose and trod a rude, instinctive measure.
So, on the earthen floor
Of his primæval dwelling,
Might dance a stone-age man in Labrador.

And then, as we
Watched our light-drunken boy

And felt his gaiety upwelling,
Faintly we seemed to hear
Vibrating down the ages, wild and clear,
Reverberations of the primal joy
Our savage fathers knew when first
Into a bleak and groping world there came,
And on their bodies beat,
The power and glory of Promethean heat,
And on their spirits burst
The magic flower of flame;
And life surged half a heaven higher
As man began his awed, extatic dance
Around that newborn radiance,
His first home fire.

TABULA RASA

His elders think of Curlyhead's baby mind
As of a virgin leaf
Whereon the hours have been too brief
To leave one written character behind.

How would they tremble if they were to look
Within that tiny head
And find no blank page, but instead
The hieroglyphs of a most ancient book

Inscribed in curious, dim ancestral ink
By hands long laid to rest
When Pharaoh's oldest palimpsest
Was still papyrus blowing on Nile's brink.

There they could read a wordless battle-song
Older than human time,
Roared in the steaming jungle slime
By many a fanged and furry simian throng.

There are weird sounds of worship that sufficed
  To tell the love of God
  In uncouth fanes our fathers trod
Ten thousand years before the cross of Christ.

PORTALS OF THE DAWN

(To Miss Catherine Bonar Law)

(Dear Kitty Law, the day I met you, keen
And fresh and laughter-loving and sixteen,
Finding this world a luscious, mellow pippin
Just waiting for your zestful teeth to dip in, —
You lured me with your young, hypnotic power
To be a boy with you for one glad hour.
Then off you tripped and left me in the cold
Where I feel haggard, lined, and strangely old.
But first you set beneath my agéd bonnet
The sentiments reflected in this sonnet:)

Earth yields to man no more delicious joy
  Than for a vivid moment to recapture
The magic world he dwelt in as a boy:
  To know the tang of grapes again, — the rapture
Of forest brooks, the scent of whittled ash,
  The glamour of the pirate beacon's glow,
And spirit casements opening for a flash
  On sunrise heavens of the long ago.

Earth yields to man no more insidious pain
Than when his dulling senses yearn to be
Tasting the old sweet sting of love again,
The old sharp kelpy fragrance of the sea;
Only to find how far his feet have gone
Forth from the dewy portals of the dawn.

ROMANCE

I. Rencontre

Just now when, at the door,
I touched your hand,
Murmuring the set forms that strangers use,
I could not choose
But thrill and tremble to meet afresh
The delicate spiced fragrance of the flesh
Known and beloved by me of yore
Under the glimmering domes of Samarkand,
When I rode back a victor from that war —
The wildest Samarkand had seen —
Darling, and made you queen.

You are my woman!
Æons before the first dim page
Of history was traced by hands uncouth
In the world's twilit youth, —
We groped, not wholly human,
And found and held each other dear.

Since then, age following age,
After our every secular rebirth,
Torn betwixt hope and fear
And a self-scornful mirth,
Lonely we search a desolate earth
Until — the sudden, blinding bliss
Of hours like this.

Could we but surely see
All that of which your sweet, half-startled eyes
Dimly, as through a veil, my soul apprise, —
Like disembodied minds we would behold
The incredible pageant of all history
Stupendously unrolled,
Where through our lives as mates
Have twined their ever linkéd fates; —
And we would recognise
Beneath what unpropitious skies,
From what insane and bestial wars,
What agonising straits on land and sea,
From what white bliss in other stars,
From under what glowing surf of hell submerged
We have, all-conquering, surged

To meet as mates again
In this dear world of men —
To what high end, for what fair destiny?

II. Wireless

Oh, we are close indeed,
Yet do not touch;
Our bodies have no need
For even so much
As the most delicate caress of finger-tips
To be aware that our souls' lips
Are pressing each on each, —
Yet not too wildly one for murmured speech.

With bodies yet aloof we feel the spark
Of the swift current leap from hand to hand
Without a touch, and make the other understand.
From spirit's arc it leaps to spirit's arc,
More potent, far, than the mere lust
Of dust for carnal dust.
For we are of the blesséd few
Who thrive on heaven's dole, —
Strong, vivid bodies drenched with soul,

Even as with mountain dew
Is drenched the fleece of many a dawn-flushed
ewe.

And now as we draw nearer
So that this warm hand lingers
Lightly upon your sweet smooth fingers,
My vision of the very you grows clearer,
More human, dearer.
With reverent surprise,
Through spirit-quickened eyes,
I read the page of you
As if my hand, divorced from my own will,
Impelled by some unearthly thrill,
Were setting down the music of your soul
Upon a dim, ethereal scroll
Unseen by mortals hitherto.

III. Word Music

When my rash pen endeavours to exalt
The movements or the policies of the time,
Decking my favourite theories in rhyme,
The measures move on leaden feet that halt

Like craven warriors dreading the assault.
When numbers mathematically chime,
Their voices sound to me no more sublime
Than bones an earthquake rattles in a vault.

But there is music when the full heart sings
The murmurous intimations of the dawn
Where virgin peaks flush in the twilit blue;
And melody mounts up on moth-like wings
When I have passed, upon your shadowy lawn,
A night of glory with the thought of you.

IV. The Loom

The shuttles of the spirit ply
Swiftly between us two
Among the shining filaments that tie
My heart to you.

Threading the crimson woof they race,
Defying mould and moth,
To weave a gift for our most holy place, —
Love's altar cloth.

V. In Absence

Though you have left this land,
Our minds walk hand in hand.

Dark tides between us roll, —
We whisper soul to soul.

Your way turns east, mine, west, —
Your bosom burns my breast!

Space cannot mar the bliss
Of holy hours, like this,

That make a swift, sublime
Eternity of time.

VI. Message

It flies across the foam
To end my hideous dream,
Trustworthy as the breath
Of the dark angel when he bids us home
After the fleeting fantasy called death,
And bright as the first gleam

From out the scroll
That is the shining gift of each new-bidden soul.

VII. Three Words

I had not known seven days could be seven years!

What sombre glory, what bright agony
Your absence brought to me
That lingering, breathless week of hopes and
fears! —
Crowned by this frantic night
When I, now worm, now god, await my torment and
delight.

At last through the relief of long-pent tears
Your loveliness appears.
At last I touch your finger-tips
And worship them with trembling lips.
Lightly I brush your cheek,
And try to speak, —
And fail;
Because, to tell that tale
No words avail.

I had not known seven days could be seven years!

About your supple body my arms wind;
My fingers find
Your breast,
And sink to troubled rest.
My tongue
Worships your bare
Sweet shoulders, your unruly hair,
And reels divinely stung
By passion's drouth
And maddened by love's opiate, among
The poppies of your mouth.

Now suddenly,
As you lean trembling close to me,
Seeming to my unsubtle wit
Passion's true archetype and counterfeit, —
You utter three low words.
With three low words,
Quiet as slumbering birds,
Soft as a far heard vesper bell,
You toll my rapture's knell;

With three scarce whispered words,
Still as the earthward fall of giant bombs
That turn great cities into tombs,
You send my heaven crashing down to hell.

And, as I clasp you still, my joy and woe,
And crystal-gaze the future in your eyes,
There I behold pale, uncouth forms arise
With bar and rack and flame, our lives to sever.

. . . . . .

That was an hour ago. . . .
I had not known an hour could be for ever!

VACATION

When last the moon was slim I saw Fate loom
Athwart my path, lowering, malevolent;
The earth was black with blood where his feet went;
His brow was harrowed by the wrath of doom.
Shrouding my future in his ghastly gloom,
To his dæmonic will my will he bent;
And I knew then what is the punishment
Of lost souls shuddering in their trap-like tomb.

Now all is changed! Breezes of hill and sea
Have blown to ribbons that old scarecrow "Fate";
Brooks brawling past my knees, precipitate,
Have brawled their verve into the marrow of me.
Nor care I now what foes my steps await.
I close with life; I am vowed to victory.

NONSENSE

LIFE is a sorry *mélange* of gold and silver and stubble,
Of roses and wormwood and weeds, of rubies and rubble.

I will take all life to my heart, and who knows but I may, ere long,
See the stubble turn gold and the wormwood bear roses of song?

MUSIC IN HOSPITAL

The flame of my life burned low;
They thought I was all but dead.
"He has not very far to go!"
Their whispering said.

Suddenly over the way,
Outswelling the din of the street,
A piano began to play;
I found it sweet.

Only a halting machine
Grinding an elfin tune
With whirrings and whangings obscene
As a tipsy buffoon;

Yet to me it meant rapture and mirth
And the endless continuing, after
These sorry adventures on Earth —
Of beauty and laughter.

Then the flame of my life burned stronger,
Blown-on by that musical elf,
And I settled to stay a while longer
Making music myself.

THE SALUTATION OF THE DAWN

(After the Sanscrit)

Hear now the salutation of the dawn.

Look well unto this day!
For it is life, — the very life of life.
Into the eddying strife
Of its brief stay,
As into some deep whirlpool's heart, are drawn
All verities that light your earthly way:
Action's bright glory and the bliss of growth
And beauty in her splendour,
Now in stern mood, now tender,
Though radiant in both.

For yesterday is but a dream,
To-morrow, but a vision.
But each to-day, lived in the perfect way,
Holds sadness in derision, —
Makes every yesterday a dream of joy,

Present though gone,
Which time can never cloy, —
Makes each to-morrow
A vision of hope untouched by care or sorrow.
Look well unto this day!

Such is the salutation of the dawn.

THREE SONNETS OF HEAVEN

I. Dream

(To the University of Virginia)

When I have done with unimmortal things
And dwell in heaven's gardens, blithe and free,
They will be kind to lesser ones like me, —
Whose souls, even while on Earth were brave with wings.
What if great Homer finds my gate and sings
The music of his loud-resounding sea?
And what if Michelangelo should be
Ready to paint his rare imaginings
Upon my mansion's wall?
Hid from the street
I think that on my lawn a beechen dial
Will mark all hours, carved there by Rodin's knife;
And Brahms will come and play with me the suite
Composed by Papa Franck for my dear viol
Of mellow wood cut from the tree of life.

II. Earth and Heaven

When dawns for us the bright, eternal day,
Shall we reject these lovely arts of Earth
And mock at them as broken toys whose worth
Passes with the brief hour of children's play?
Shall poets' domes and towers melt away
To the mean compass of a hovel's girth? —
The painted walls of Florence move our mirth
Like pavement daubs fouled by a passing dray?
No! Shakespeare's holy bread was fraught with leaven
Sublime on Earth, — sublime in the high heaven.
There Vinci's brush will stir us still like wine,
The vault of Rheims vibrate within our veins,
And Bach's deep voice make heaven the more divine.
God's fire shall warm the soul where'er He reigns.

III. Seaward

(To E. F. Benson)

For ever soiled and yet for ever pure,
It draws into its depths, without a stain,
Whatever the polluted land can drain
From compost-heap and charnel ground and sewer.
Earth generates no filth that may endure

When plunged within the exuberant, bright main.
So round man's foulness and his festering pain
Lies fathomless the peace God shall assure
When Earth is shrivelled like a crumbling pod.
Upon man's coast thunders divinity.
That shall the soiled soul utterly purify
So it may pass the rapturous gate of God.
Death is a plunge within that stainless sea;
Nor may man wholly live except he die.

TO K. De N. S.

I. Harvest

They heard that she was dying, and they came,
The reticent New England village folk,
And wrestled with their tongues and, stammering, spoke
Their very hearts, torn betwixt love and shame.
The wheelwright brought a crock of flowering flame
And, with moist eyes, said: "Madam, ef a stroke
O' the axe could save ye — (and this ain't no joke) —
I'd cut my right hand off to do that same!"
When her white soul had sped the fisherman rowed
A fare of fish — his parting gift — ashore,
And choked upon the words: "I never knowed
No one I liked so well as her afore."
And the charwoman sobbed: " 'T was me she showed
How not to get downhearted any more."

II. Safe

Now shall your beauty never fade,
For it was budding when you passed

From out this glare into the shade
Of fairer gardens unforecast,
Where, by the gardener's dreaded spade,
Beauty, transplanted once, will ever last.

Now never shall your glorious breast
Wither, your deft hands lose their art,
Nor those proud shoulders be oppressed
By failing breath or fluttering heart,
Nor, from the cheek by dawn possessed,
The subtle extasy of hue depart.

For ever shall you be your best; —
Nay, far more luminously shine
Than when our comradeship was blessed
By what on earth seemed most divine,
Before your body passed to rest
With what I then supposed this heart of mine.

As you sweep on from power to power
Shall every earthward thought you think
Irradiate my lonely hour
Until I taste the golden drink

Of Life, and see the full-blown flower
Whose opening bud was mine beyond the brink.

III. The Wine of God

I used to dream the Heavenly wine
Would not be mine
Until the weeds of death had darkened well
The ruins of my fleshly citadel.

But ever since you went away
Out of that so divinely moulded clay,
And raised my spirit up
To catch the sight
Of you with the glad seraphim at play, —
Now, every night,
I taste the wine of God from your own cup,
And feel it glow within me all the day.

IV. Before the Great Adventure

Think not of me as one whom death could cheat
Of what men hold on Earth supremely good;
Save for the miracle of fatherhood,
I have known all that makes a life complete:

Summits where poetry lies at music's feet;
Nature's brown breast within the autumn wood;
The uttermost bounty of love's plenitude;
Hours when the God in me and Godhead meet.
But think of me as one solely content
To wait on Earth a desolate while alone,
Nor hasten forth where dying footsteps went, —
That he might spend his brain and blood and bone
In the great cause, and, having fully spent,
Leap to the arms for evermore his own.

FROM "SCUM O' THE EARTH, AND OTHER POEMS"

"SCUM O' THE EARTH"

I

At the gate of the West I stand,
On the isle where the nations throng.
We call them "scum o' the earth";

Stay, are we doing you wrong,
Young fellow from Socrates' land? —
You, like a Hermes so lissome and strong
Fresh from the master Praxiteles' hand?
So, you're of Spartan birth?
Descended, perhaps, from one of the band —
Deathless in story and song —
Who combed their long hair at Thermopylæ's pass? . . .
Ah, I forget what straits (alas!),
More tragic than theirs, more compassion-worth,
Have doomed you to march in our "immigrant class"
Where you're nothing but "scum o' the earth."

II

You Pole with the child on your knee,
What dower bring you to the land of the free?

Hark! does she croon
The sad little tune
That Chopin once found on his Polish lea
And mounted in gold for you and for me?
Now a ragged young fiddler answers
In wild Czech melody
That Dvořak took whole from the dancers.
And the heavy faces bloom
In the wonderful Slavic way;
The little, dull eyes, the brows a-gloom,
Suddenly dawn like the day.
While, watching these folk and their mystery,
I forget that we,
In our scornful mirth,
Brand them as "polacks" — and "scum o' the earth."

III

Genoese boy of the level brow,
Lad of the lustrous, dreamy eyes
Agaze at Manhattan's pinnacles now
In the first, sweet shock of a hushed surprise;
Within your far-rapt seer's eyes
I catch the glow of the wild surmise

That played on the Santa Maria's prow
In that still gray dawn,
Four centuries gone,
When a world from the wave began to rise.
Oh, who shall foretell what high emprise
Is the goal that gleams
When Italy's dreams
Spread wing and sweep into the skies?
Cæsar dreamed him a world ruled well;
Dante dreamed Heaven out of Hell;
Angelo brought us there to dwell.
And you, are you of a different birth? —
You're only a "dago," — and "scum o' the earth"!

IV

Stay, are we doing you wrong
Calling you "scum o' the earth,"
Man of the sorrow-bowed head,
Of the features tender yet strong, —
Man of the eyes full of wisdom and mystery
Mingled with patience and dread?
Have not I known you in history,
Sorrow-bowed head?

Were you the poet-king, worth
Treasures of Ophir unpriced?
Were you the prophet, perchance, whose art
Foretold how the rabble would mock
That shepherd of spirits, ere long,
Who should gather the lambs to his heart
And tenderly feed his flock?
Man — lift that sorrow-bowed head. . . .
Behold, the face of the Christ!

The vision dies at its birth.
You're merely a butt for our mirth.
You're a "sheeny" — and therefore despised
And rejected as "scum o' the earth."

V

Countrymen, bend and invoke
Mercy for us blasphemers,
For that we spat on these marvellous folk,
Nations of darers and dreamers,
Scions of singers and seers,
Our peers, and more than our peers.
"Rabble and refuse," we name them

And "scum o' the earth," to shame them.
Mercy for us of the few, young years,
Of the culture so callow and crude,
Of the hands so grasping and rude,
The lips so ready for sneers
At the sons of our ancient more-than-peers.
Mercy for us who dare despise
Men in whose loins our Homer lies;
Mothers of men who shall bring to us
The glory of Titian, the grandeur of Huss;
Children in whose frail arms may rest
Prophets and singers and saints of the West.

Newcomers all from the eastern seas,
Help us incarnate dreams like these.
Forget, and forgive, that we did you wrong.
Help us to father a nation strong
In the comradeship of an equal birth,
In the wealth of the richest bloods of earth.

FRIEND SOUL

From the zest of the land of the living,
From work and reflection and play,
From the getting of love and the giving
I hasten away.

For I have a friend from the high land
Who's larked with me long on my plain;
And now to his glamorous sky-land
We're posting amain.

Up yonder his mansions are legion;
Though he's met on the street with a stare
Here, where I'm the lord of the region; —
So turn about's fair.

We leave the snug inn on the high road;
I wave to my valley with pride,
Then we turn up the beckoning by-road
And swing into stride.

THE SYMPHONY

Carry me home to the pine wood;
Give me to sleep by the sea;
Leave me alone with the lulling tone
Of the south wind's phantasy.

For I am weary of discord;
Sick of the clash of this strife, —
Sick of the bane of this prelude of pain,
And I yearn for the symphony — *life*.

THE VIOLIN

Sometimes the violin seems to me
A type of what the soul must be

When it has put aside the bark
And come from out the friendly dark

Where wayward forest breezes run —
To lie and mellow in the sun.

The master with unerring hand
Prepares it for the spirit-land.

But ever, as the seasons roll
Their roundelay through branch and bole, —

What though its voice has come to be
The voice of immortality? —

The old, old spirit stirs within
The nature of the violin.

And so, as if some dear, dead friend
A word to those behind should send,

It speaks to common human ears
Of morning blessings, evening tears;

And runs, with more than mortal art,
The gamut of the human heart.

FOR THE FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE

By Giorgione

(In the Louvre)

Play on, my brother, play;
Nor let tone's lulling extasy surprise
The stirring of your lute-cords into calm.
How good to float away
An hour from out the thralldom of the eyes;
To taste the balm
Of this benign, unsensual draught of tone;
To wend cool spirit-ways alone,
Unmindful of what glowing mysteries,
What passion flowers are lurking in the grass;
Nor thrill when her rich languorous pipings pass
To merge in your compelling harmonies.

Play on, my brother, play;
For one swift hour to-day
Our spirits, freed from sight's insistent mesh,
Have overcome the indomitable flesh,

And felt the end
Whereto our beings tend.

Hark what the noon-stars say!
Play on, my brother, play.

THE MUSIC MAKER

(In Memory of an Evening at Richard Watson Gilder's Home)

Beneath the bow
Your live cords, *'cello mio*, throb and stir, —
My viol-like, dreamful child of Gasparo, —
Raising from reverie your Lombard voice,
And bidding us rejoice,
In all the things of soul and sense that make
These beauty-consecrated chambers glow
As though they were
In your ancestral home by Garda lake.

Now, as beneath the tense exultant fingers,
The music flows or lingers,
The presence of the viol passes quite;
And, for a little space,
Rapt out of touch and sight,
With Bach the master I am face to face.

And now,
In ways unlike the laboured ways of earth —

I know not how —
That part of man which is most worth
Comes forth at call of this old sarabande
And lays a spirit-hand
With mine upon the strings that understand.

Our painter lends his palette to a tone
That is no more mine own.
Lo! he that 'from the sterile womb of stone
Raises up children unto God' is there
To make the sarabande in form more fair;
And our dear poet with the glowing eyes
Brings to the shrine of tone his evening sacrifice;
While, filling all the place, below, above,
There radiates the starlight of my love.

O comrade heart, shall life be thus when we —
Beyond the portal of eternity —
Shall enter into that long extasy?

Shall we float thus upon a flood of tone,
Discumbered of these garments long outgrown,
Alone, yet gloriously un-alone?

Yes, love, we shall relive this great to-day,
When our sheer souls, in the immortal way,
Have uttered what our lips might never say.

FROM "THE WHITE COMRADE, AND OTHER POEMS"

THE WHITE COMRADE[1]

Under our curtain of fire,
Over the clotted clods,
We charged, to be withered, to reel
And despairingly wheel
When the signal bade us retire
From the terrible odds.

As we ebbed with the battle-tide,
Fingers of red-hot steel
Suddenly closed on my side.
I fell, and began to pray.
I crawled on my hands and lay
Where a shallow crater yawned wide;
Then, — I swooned. . . .

When I woke it yet was day.
Fierce was the pain of my wound;
But I knew it was death to stir,
For fifty paces away

[1] The idea of this poem was suggested by an anonymous newspaper clipping, which was traced, long after publication, to "The Comrade in White," a story written on the western front by W. H. Leatham.

R. H. S.

Their trenches were.
In torture I prayed for the dark
And the stealthy step of my friend
Who, staunch to the end,
Would creep to the danger-zone
And offer his life as a mark
To save my own.

Night came. I heard his tread, —
Not stealthy, but firm and serene,
As if my comrade's head
Were lifted far from that scene
Of passion and pain and dread;
As if my comrade's heart
In carnage had no part;
As if my comrade's feet
Were set on some radiant street
No darkness could haunt;
As if my comrade's eyes
No deluge of flame could surprise,
No death and destruction daunt,
No red-beaked bird dismay,
Nor sight of decay.

Then, in the bursting shells' dim light,
I saw he was clad in white.
For a moment I thought that I saw the smock
Of a shepherd in search of his flock.
Alert were the enemy, too,
And their bullets flew
Straight at a mark no bullet might fail;
For the seeker was tall and his robe was bright;
But he did not flee nor quail.
Instead, with unhurrying stride,
He came,
Still as the white star low in the west,
And gathering my tall frame,
Like a child to his breast. . . .

Again I slept; — and awoke
From a blissful dream
In a cave by a stream.
My silent comrade had bound my side.
No pain was mine, but a wish that I spoke, —
A mastering wish to serve this man
Who had ventured through hell my doom to revoke,
As only the truest of comrades can.

I begged him to tell how best I might aid him,
And urgently prayed him
Never to leave me, whatever betide;
When I saw he was hurt —
Shot through the hands that were joined in prayer!
Then, as the dark drops gathered there
And fell in the dirt,
The wounds of my friend
Seemed to me such as no man might bear;
Those bullet-holes in the patient hands
Seemed to transcend
All horrors that ever these war-drenched lands
Had known or would know till the mad world's end.
Then suddenly I was aware
That his feet had been wounded, too,
And dimming the white of his side
A dull stain grew.
"You are hurt, White Comrade!" I cried.
Already his words I foreknew:
"*These are old wounds,*" said he,
"*But of late they have troubled me.*"

A SOUL REMEMBERS

Once, in my moment of Earth,
Before the immortal rebirth,
I looked on my flesh as a thing
Like to the house of a king, —
Beautiful, worthy to stand
Proud on the heavenly strand.

I remember it now as a clod
Prone in the gardens of God,
Mean, without honour or beauty,
Justified but by the duty
Of spending its pittance of power
In rearing a heavenly flower.

THE WONDERFUL HOUR

I RAMBLED alone in the marsh;
The clouds drooped sullen and harsh;
The ruts of the mean road bristled below
Their tatters of slushy snow.
Ebbing trickles of salt creek spread
Sad, colourless, dull as lead.
The brightness had fallen from the grass,
And the sparkle had flown from the bay;
No beauty nor cheer were left, alas!
Trusty nature had failed me that day;
Her heartening word remained unspoken;
I thought her inviolate tryst was broken.

Suddenly dawned the wonderful hour;
I drank deep breaths of the primal power.
And the tides of my being began to glow
Like westerly surf when the sun is low.
My casements flew open that I might see
The magic, the worth and the mystery
Of runnel and sedge and gaunt-limbed tree.

From my work-a-day wrappings of murky cloud
I burst, as a man who should wake in his shroud
Might burst through the ring of the sorrowing crowd.
My plod turned buoyant, my vision, keen;
The river was glossed with a lacquery sheen.
Though the swords of the sun could not slash through,
Each puddle was dreaming of turquoise blue.
Transmuted to amber the wet ruts lay,
And the mean marsh road was a royal way.

THE BROKEN WINDOW

In my ignorant days, in my witless years,
I peeped at life through a window of fears
That distorted the world like an ill-wrought pane
Clouded with bubbles and flawed in grain; —
Such glass as had warped for my childhood's eyes
The work-a-day street when dusk came down
On the smoke-drenched town,
Where I watched through the window, in awed surprise,
The dog turn dragon, the corner post
Writhe to the shape of a headless ghost.

My best-loved comrade's parting breath
Haunted my ears as, alone with death,
I gazed with dread, through my window of fears,
Down the stair-like descent of my ageing years.
And I was aware that shapes of despair
Lurked for me there on each grim stair,
With coals to banish from out these eyes
Faces and books and the red dawn's rise;

With poniards ground fine to pierce the ears
That had caught the pulse of the choiring spheres;
With a rack whereon they would bind me to lie
Powerless, half human, unable to die
Till the stair should crumble away for my fall
To the jaws of the bottomless pit under all.

With frantic eyes I sought egress;
My spirit thirsted for nothingness;
But suddenly, as I faced despair,
My best-loved comrade was with me there.
He met each test of my sceptic wit
With glad assurance, and conquered it.

"Comrade," he breathed, "fright holds you now;
There is dread in your eyes and damp on your brow.
You have peeped through a clouded window of fears;
Gaze now at life with a sight that enspheres
All the woes of earth, as they verily are,
With the life of the soul in the outermost star.
Look through my eyes!"

I looked, and lo! —
With a crash like the splash of the cursed

Who should plunge in a crystalline pool,
Healing, delicious and cool,
To slake an unbearable thirst —
My window of fears was burst
By the force of an unseen blow;
And, lo!
The long, dark stairway of human woe
No more than a fleck of soot, became,
Brushed from the wick of a primal flame,
For his heel to spurn who has newly trod
Through dusk to a great dawn lit by the same,
When his feet shall spring on the flower-starred sod
Of the uplands of vision and power,
With no term set to beatitude's hour.

Then I knew that the death of a well-loved friend,
Or the death of this well-loved frame,
In very truth became
No bottomless pit of flame, —
No ignominious end, —
No death; —
But the first, long, shuddering breath
That the new man draws, whose frame

Escapes from its black duress
To the breast of a mother's tenderness, —
To the kiss of the wind
And the magic of mind,
And the myriad beauties to which he was blind.

Then I knew why Jeanne d'Arc sang as the fire
Crackled below her martyr's pyre;
For her window of fears, accursed, —
Her clouded pane, had burst;
And still, as the world went dark,
That searing vision could see
Earth as one cooling spark
From a sun of eternity.

Nay, even the sight of a world at strife,
Blasted and horror-torn,
Seen now, from the height of the endless life,
Appeared as the blood-drenched morn
Of a cosmic saviour's birth,
Who should open the eyes of the sphere
To visions more radiant and clear,
More thrilling and wonder-worth: —

To the wisdom, the beauty, the laughter
Of the fairest ways of the here
And the all-transcending hereafter.

My brow grew serene,
My vision, keen.
Now I saw that nothing may harm that man
Who carries the torch of his soul,
As only the constant can,
Unquenched to its ultimate goal.
Now I knew that my comrade, at last, I knew,
And my soul could envision him through and through.
Swifter than fear I flashed through space,
And communed with the Infinite face to face.

. . . . . .

I homed to the sphere of the slow-grinding hours,
To the travail, the terror, the pain
Of humanity's dim-eyed reign.
I put off my Heavenly powers;
Yet did I carry with me
Sight that for ever shall see
Whatever things mortal there be
From the height of eternity.

And ever there ring in my ear
The tones of a high command:
"*Be strong to raise thy hand*
To the windows whence mortals peer
Palsied by terror, insane.
Strike with thy might and main!
Let in my air again!
Drive forth the phantom, fear!
Shatter the clouded pane!"

HIDDEN TREASURE

(For George Gray Barnard's Cloisters on Washington Heights, New York City)

Embedded deep in the unlovely walls
Of hovel and enclosure, pen and byre,
These lovely shards of the old abbey halls
And towers lay hidden: —
Statue and plinth and subtly planed lunette,
Rare capital, incomparable tomb, —
Lost like a sapphire caked in mire,
Or pearl shell-ridden.

Concealed they lay, oblivious of their doom,
While, star-like, generations rose and set, —
More like us men, perhaps, than we know yet,
Who, in a whorl of worlds whose vision chokes
the breath,
Drowse on through time, mistaking life for death.

Then came a man with vision to divine
The treasures in the wall.

He drew them forth and built of them a shrine
Where all
Might play their destined part,
And each long-hidden shard of loveliness
Express,
With individual art,
The myriad oneness that is beauty's heart.

Now what great hand shall delve into the wall
That crusts our mortal frame's immortal mind,
And rear therefrom a shrine our God may call
The temple of mankind?

WORSHIP

Of late this was the loftiest word I knew
To tell my worship of your body's grace,
Your eyes where love and laughter interlace
And when the gorgeous mind comes flashing through; —
My worship when the soul's transcendent hue,
Through irised windows, turns your lovelier face
Shrine-like into the Godhead's dwelling place: —
"Next to my love for God is mine for you."

Thus yesterday; but now, since your white hand
Has led me upward to the promised land
Of this world's highest heaven, from this world's hell,
Through ways more dazzling than my sight may stand, —
Dearest, I love you more than prayer can tell, —
He were a saint who loved his God so well.

OVER-TONES

Poet, lift up your voice!
Not alone to yourself do you owe it
To spend to the full in the worship of beauty
Body and spirit and mind;
You owe it to legions of mute, inglorious singers, —
Singers you never behold, but who join you in song
By grace of the mystical converse
That quickens the fronds of your mind
In the soundless waves of the songs of the souls of men,
Torn whence —
All arts must perish like sea-flowers cast on the shore.

For, enlarging, enriching each note of the voice
That brings you the honour which brightens your name,
Ring over-tones not of your making, —
Unheard by the conscious ear,
But thrillingly plain to the all-perceiving unconscious.
Round and mellow they ring, sonorous with pleasure,
Like hunting-horns far-heard

Over the floor of a dawn-flushed lake,
Or vibrant with passion,
Bubbling with laughter,
Poignant and shudderingly sweet with the stirrings of love,
Or muffled by pain;
Over-tones richly enveined with the gold of unsatisfied longing,
Strong as the prayer of the saviour who dies for his friend,
Pure as the cry of the soul when a rending of veils
Discloses the heavenly city.

DIVERS

Clad in thick mail he stumbles down the floor
Of the dark primæval ocean; — on his head
A casque more gross than ever helmeted
Crusader against Saracen. Before
His glass-dimmed eyes dart shapes like fiends of yore,
Or like malignant spirits of the dead,
To snatch and snap the line where through is fed
A meagre air to that strange visitor.
Stumbling we grope and stifle here below
In the gross garb of this too cumbering flesh,
And draw such hard-won breaths as may be drawn,
Until, perchance with pearls, we rise and go
To doff our diver's mail and taste the fresh,
The generous winds of the eternal dawn.

THE SHADOW OF ASPIRATION

My summit calls. Its floors are shod
With rainbows laughing up to God.

But oh, the jagged ways and bleak
That give upon that lonely peak!

WORDS AND MUSIC

Poems are dewberries picked in a dream;
Music bedecks them with sugar and cream.
The result is a succulent savour, —
But where is the dewberry flavour?

TO THE PAINT-BRUSH POETS

Although you may loudly protest
That the poet should write with a palette
Or hammer his pen with a mallet, —
Chisel and brush are best
For faithfully showing the look
Of a man or a beast or a brook.

Are you cramped by the poet's own themes?
His boundaries are wide as the ocean:
The surge of great passions in motion,
Thought's lightning, the white surf of dreams,
Why shun them, for novelty's look,
To splash in an alien brook?

BROWNING, THE MUSIC MASTER

(To Florence Manvel Schauffler)

Oh, I once was a lad
Of a single thought,
Melody-mad,
With ears for nought
But the miracles Bach and Beethoven wrought,
When suddenly you,
Out of the blue,
With your formal old master Galuppi, dropped,
And grim-eyed Hugues
Of the mountainous fugues,
And the rampired walls of the marvellous Abt, —
To build me, from Music's far-off strand,
A way to a humaner, dearer shore, —
A bridge to poetry-land.

Then to my soul I swore:
"If poets may win such store
Of music's own highland air,

Yet abide in the common round,
Transmuting man's dusty ground
To gems for the world to wear, —
Theirs too is a priceless art, —
Is a thing that I fain would share, —
A thing that is near to my heart!"

Thus were a young soul's ears unstopped
By Galuppi and Hugues and the marvellous Abt,
Who bridged a way for ignorant feet
And parted wide for wondering eyes
The port of a second paradise;
Showing how right it is, and meet
That a Schubert's voice may never repeat,
With the self-same thought and the self-same beat,
Measures a Milton's lips have dropped; —
That music waxes where poesy wanes,
And, with thirsty lips to poesy's veins,
Grows by her want, by her wasting, gains.

For music, the protean, is this, and this:
The rainbow shimmer of love's first bliss,
A despairing gesture, a dream-like whim,

The down on the plumes of the Cherubim,
The body of Ariel, lissome and fresh, —
Too subtle for poesy's golden mesh, —
An exquisite, evanescent shape
That "breaks through language" to escape
To the bourne of that country, brighter, vaster,
Where now you are singing, dear Music Master.

PARADISE REVISED

Playing hymn-tunes day and night
On a harp, *may* be all right
For the grown-ups; but for me
I do wish that Heaven could be
Sort o' like a circus, run
So a kid could have some fun!

There I'd not play harps, but horns
When I chased the unicorns:
Magic tubes with pistons greasy,
Slides that pushed and pulled out easy,
Cylinders of snaky brass
Where the fingers like to fuss,
Polished like a looking-glass,
Ending in a blunderbuss.

I would ride a horse of steel
Wound up with a ratchet-wheel.
Every beast I'd put to rout
Like the man I read about.

I would singe the leopard's hair,
Stalk the vampire and the adder,
Drive the werewolf from his lair,
Make the mad gorilla madder.
Needle-guns my work would do;
But, if beasts got closer to,
I would pierce 'em to the marrow
With a barbed and poisoned arrow,
Or I'd whack 'em on the skull
Till my scimitar was dull.

If these weapons did n't work,
With a kris or bowie-knife,
Poniard, assegai or dirk
I would make 'em beg for life;
Spare 'em, though, if they'd be good
And guard me from what haunts the wood,
From those creepy, shuddery sights
That come 'round a fellow nights:
Imps that squeak and trolls that prowl,
Ghouls, the slimy devil-fowl,
Headless goblins with lassoes,
Scarlet witches worse than those,

Flying dragon-fish that bellow
So as most to scare a fellow. . . .

There, as nearly as I could,
I would live like Robin Hood,
Taking down the mean and haughty,
Getting plunder from the naughty
To reward all honest men
Who approached my outlaw's den.

When I'd wearied of these pleasures
I'd go seek for hidden treasures, —
In no ordinary way:
Pirates' luggers I'd waylay;
Board 'em from my sinking dory,
Wade through decks of gore and glory,
Drive the fiends, with blazing matchlock,
Down below, and snap the hatch-lock.

Next, I'd scud beneath the sky-land,
Sight the hills of Treasure Island,
Prowl and peer and prod and prise,
Till there burst upon my eyes

Just the proper pirates' freight:
Gold doubloons and pieces of eight!

Then — the very best of all —
Suddenly a stranger tall
Would appear, and I'd forget
That we had n't ever met,
And with waving cap I'd greet him
(Turning from the plunder yellow),
And I'd hurry fast to meet him,
For he'd be the very fellow
Who, I think, invented fun —
Robert Louis Stevenson.

TRYST

'Long about dusk I'd see him go
Almost a-runnin' through the snow
Bound for the marsh, like a feller who's late
Meetin' some girl, you know, — keepin' a "date."
"Jest like them dudes," thinks I, "to roam
With girls in the marsh, and their wives to home!"

So, one fine day, I on with my hood
And follered his tracks to the edge o' the wood
Where the marsh begins, to see who it was
Meetin' my neighbour's man, — because
I liked Mis' Joyce, — and she oughter know
O' the goin's-on out there in the snow!

Well, what do you s'pose I saw? — Instead er
A girl, there wa'n't nothin' but common salt meader,
And him on the bridge pacin' up and down
Watchin' the grasses float and drown
In the flood o' the tide, and the cakes of ice

Swim up westward. He looked so nice,
And pleased and content, it seemed like he
Was findin' himself rare company;
And never once did he turn his head
From the west, to look for a skirt instead.

I sneaked back home by the pasture lane,
And studied and puzzled and addled my brain
To guess why he hurried so, only to stand
And gape at the west with his hat in his hand.

Next mornin' says I to my neighbour: "Say
Why does your man allus hurry that way
Past my house, the end of the day?"
Says she: "To look at the sunset, dear,
Out where there's nothing to interfere."
Says I: "Now ain't you city folks queer!
What's in a sunset for to see?"
"Look for yourself, my dear," says she.

So, late that day, I thought for to look
Out o' the winder near where I cook.
The sky was a nice red birthday cake
Spattered with candles.

Mercy sake!
I dropped the cutter; I dropped the dough;
I stood there gapin' outdoors as though
One o' them fairy tales was true,
And I was a princess with nothin' to do
But watch a girl sewin' with silver thread
On pink satin curtains to hang 'round my bed.

I hurried across and opened the door;
Never seed nothin' so purty afore!
Then under my eyes, things turned to a dome
O' meltin' gold, like a honeycomb.
Some bee must 'a' come from that fairy hive
And stung me, and made me feel all alive. . . .

Funny what tricks yer eyes will play
If any one happens to show 'em the way!

MEUSE-ARGONNE LYRICS

I. Fear of Fear

Only one thing I feared,
  And it was this:
That when the day appeared
  My soul might miss
That scorn of death and anguish whence
It drew its quiet confidence.

I minded nothing now
  But the misgiving
That I might grow, somehow,
  Too bent on living.
I feared my confidence might fail
When gas and shrapnel told their tale.

Daily that shameful doubt
  Made my cheek blench
Until the Hun wiped out
  Our starting trench.

Then, in the hell of shell and shot,
I knew the fear of fear was not.

II. The Look in Their Eyes

Youthful and buoyant and blithe they went into battle,
Fresh as Olympian athletes strung for the prize;
Aged and broken and done they dragged from the victory,
All with that look, that terrible look in their eyes.

Plainly I saw in their eyes the plunge of the bayonet.
Plainly the wires' fresh red, and the faint, over-wise
Frown on a comrade's cold lips, and his blackening body
Were mirrored once more by the terrible look in their eyes.

Never again shall they greet, in the glow of youth's glamour,
Forests or tremulous dawns or the round moon's rise,
Or beauty or grandeur or love or the glory of heaven
Who return with the mark of the knowledge of hell in their eyes.

III. Hit

(To Princeton University)

A crack and a zip!
I went to the ground
As if my hip
Had been caught in the path of a leaden bat
Which a demon batsman was whirling around
In the throes of an inter-stellar game.
I struggled to rise, but my side was aflame;
And I felt ashamed I had come to that.
My first thought was that it could not be
Me they had hit, — who was going scot free —
Me!

My next thought carried me back with a whirr
To a distant place and a distant day,
And sharply showed me an old dead-beat,
Pinned so tight that he could not stir,
Under a trolley in lower Broadway,
With one foot off, and his face in the street; —
A shameful way for a fellow to lie,
For one of our human clan to die,
Flat in the mud where he could n't writhe free!

And the same
Old shame
I had felt for him
And his severed limb,
Rose for myself in me; —
Shame for my plight as if I were
Pinioned there like a fox in a trap,
Or a felon strapped to the murderer's chair,
Blind in the cap.

But, after that
Emotional riot
Had simmered to quiet —
Though the German chap
In the tree, who had shot me,
Kept trying to pot me,
And bullets spat
In the ground
All around; —
Not another emotion
For months on end
Did fortune allot me, —
Not even a feeling of decent devotion

To that true friend
Who had crawled to my side
And dragged me to cover.

Like a pierced balloon, emotion went down.
No more could I glow like a friend or a lover.
The demons and gods I had cherished:
Compassion, hope, envy and pride,
Faith, reverence, thirst for renown,
Hate, loyalty, — all
The passions that make the heart wide,
The passions that make the heart small, —
Had been hit, every one,
By that sniper's gun,
And had perished.

When the war was done
I could scarcely rejoice
Or savour the sweets
Of the revelling, joy-drunk Paris streets.
I could find no voice
To curse the Hun.
Emotion was dead.

Nor could I feel any jubilant thread
Strung white-hot from my heart to my head
When I waited on deck that dazzling day
And the crowded transport swung up the bay. . . .

Thus I lived like one in a trance,
Drawing dull breath
In a living death,
Until one day in a well-loved town,
As I stood in my old college hall again
And saw the seniors in cap and gown,
Bronzed young veterans back from France,
Sightless, some, or with empty sleeve,
Back once more
With laurels from No-Man's Land, to weave
In the laurel crown of the Mother of Men, —
Come out of horrors they could not tell
To offer their Mother a new renown
And to say "Farewell!" —
Gilding her name with a fresh romance
Snatched out of hell; —
Then the organ spoke and the young men sang
"*The Son of God goes forth to war.*"

Poignant and deep through the vaulting rang —
Filled with the youth of that "chosen band": —
"*Who follows in His train?*"

Then — why, I shall never understand —
Some note borne on that strong refrain
Paid to my heart its long arrears;
Red dawn flooded my frozen brain;
And hot in my eyes lay the gift of tears.

EARTH'S EASTER

MCMXVI

Earth has gone up from its Gethsemane,
And now on Golgotha is crucified;
The spear is twisted in the tortured side;
The thorny crown still works its cruelty.
Hark! while the victim suffers on the tree,
There sound through starry spaces, far and wide,
Such words as in the last despair are cried:
"My God! my God! Thou hast forsaken me!"

But when earth's members from the cross are drawn,
And all we love into the grave is gone,
This hope shall be a spark within the gloom:
That, in the glow of some stupendous dawn,
We may go forth to find, where lilies bloom,
Two angels bright before an empty tomb.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

If this my pen
Has ever seemed to move aright
And faithfully indite
Words that have come from bournes beyond my ken, —
Give no more praise to me
Than should his portion be
Whose fingers, with a wondering delight,
Move among viol-strings
And seek to give again
The fruits of greater minds' imaginings, —
Music that is the dower of all men.

For I am only he
Who seeks again to give,
Without initiative,
Faint melodies that, deep within his brain,
With joy that is half pain,
Sound echoed from the rapturous, distant throng
Of festivals that to all time belong.

Alas! my pen
Never may purely give that song again.
Alas! the clownish hand
Whose fingers hover,
Fretting the string,
But powerless to recover
From music's wonderland
More than this harsher remnant-thing,
From what, — compact of Heaven's own dew
and light
And murmurs of the bright,
The vast, harmonious, eternal main, —
The Lord of beauty set within this brain
For this my hand to echo how it can,
Crudely translating into coarser tone,
To sound above life's roar to every man,
Music no man may claim as his alone.

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 10043 120 2